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THREE-YEAR CREE PROGRAM

Prepared by Blue Quills
Native Education Council

Alberta Education
1980

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F O R E W O R D

The basic purpose of this document is to suggest a basic Cree Program for secondary school students in Alberta. In the planning of such a program it is very important for teachers of Cree to be aware of the entire teaching process. This program is based on teaching the Cree language through various objectives. An evaluation of the learning-teaching experience is then made in terms of the stated objectives as evidenced in terminal behaviour and taking into consideration the initial behaviour of the learner.

First of all we should briefly consider what is included in the general term, the Cree language. There are several dialects of Cree: Plains Cree, Woods Cree, "R" Cree, Moose Cree. None of these dialects, however, can be considered more "correct" than any other. Unlike some European languages which designate one dialect as the "standard", or socially most acceptable way of speaking, Cree is equally proper when spoken in any of its regional variations.

The dialects of the Cree language differ in a few sounds and in occasional words, but the differences are relatively minor. As an example of these regional variations, let us look at the word "I" in the several dialects.

Swampy Cree	-	nīna
Plains Cree	-	nīya
Woods Cree	-	nītha
Moose Cree	-	nīla

To benefit fully from the study of the Cree language, a student should acquire some cultural understanding and appreciation of the Cree speaking people.

Throughout the Program, cultural topics will be integrated with the development of the communication skills. It is recommended that efforts be made to have students acquire proficiency in the four basic communication skills: listening, speaking, reading, writing.

Upon entry into the program students have varying levels of proficiency in the Cree language. Therefore it is the intent of the developers of this course that teachers evaluate the language proficiency of each student and attempt to group them accordingly.

It is not the intent of the Program to dictate any particular teaching methodology. It is suggested however that teachers should approach the teaching of Cree in such a way as to reflect the specific needs of his/her students in a given geographic area.

I. INTRODUCTION

A. The Nature of the Language

In part a language is a means of understanding thoughts, ideas, emotions, and desires which are expressed through speech or sound. It is also a basic way of communicating ideas or feelings by the use of signs, gestures and movement which are bound by certain rules created by the speaker of a particular language. For every language, different moods can be expressed in different ways. A study of each language will require an understanding of the particular culture, so as to be able to communicate efficiently and effectively.

B. Why Learn the Cree Language?

A student who is willing to learn the Cree language will acquire a substantial body of useful knowledge and skills if he is able to communicate in that language effectively. The student will have different attitudes and insights which are not readily acquired through any other discipline. For instance, he will have an appreciation of the values which are inherent in the behaviour patterns of the people whose language is being learned. In this way learning the language means not only studying the words and grammar, but learning to understand the culture as well.

C. Why Learn Cree as a Second Language?

1. Historical Reasons

Indian people in the past and even in present times have been or are considered as people who are not capable of managing their own affairs. At one time, the Department of Indian Affairs decided to "educate" the Indian people further and further away from their native culture. This occurred in schools where Indians were not allowed to use their language. This in turn has made some Indians develop an inferiority complex. Unfortunately, this situation could continue unless the dominant society shows a willingness to accept Indian people as fully participating members, recognizing their capabilities and the contributions made by the Indian people to society as a whole.

2. Economic Reasons

Within the last few years native people have shown increased initiative in controlling their own affairs in administration, business, media and entertainment. At this time ability to speak and read a native language can be an asset in obtaining a good job.

3. Cultural Reasons

Two interrelated definitions of culture linked by a set of commonly shared values and cultural themes are:

1. Culture refers to a people's achievements and contributions to civilization in such fields as art, music, literature, architecture, technology, science and philosophy.
2. Culture also refers to the behavioural patterns or life styles of people. To illustrate, the study of behavioural patterns and life styles might focus on such topics as:
 - a. When and what people eat;
 - b. How they make a living;
 - c. The way they organize their society;
 - d. The attitudes they express toward friends and members of their families;
 - e. How they act in different situations;
 - f. What expressions are used to show approval and disapproval; and
 - g. The traditions observed

It is this latter definition that should form the focus of learning activities in the classroom. To acquire knowledge of the legends, stories and beliefs of one's ancestors is an enriching experience in itself and it further enhances one's sense of belonging.

II. GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Goals in this course should be categorized into two specific areas, Cultural and Linguistic. This means that a student learning the language should be able to develop cultural understanding through gaining proficiency in the language.

What should a student be able to do?

A. Cultural Objectives

1. A student should gain a better understanding of oneself by learning about his/her culture.
2. A student should pursue a goals of trying to understand the values and behaviour patterns of the Cree people - whose language is being studied.
3. A student should appreciate the contribution made to society by these people.

B. Linguistic Objectives

1. A student should be able to understand the structure and functioning of the language being studied.
Specifically the following are needed. The student:

- a. Should be able to understand the language when spoken at normal speed on a subject within a range of the student's linguistic experience and areas of interest.
- b. Be able to speak the language well enough to communicate within limitations of the course being taught.
- c. Be able to read the language with direct understanding for information and enjoyment.
- d. Be able to write with reasonable ease anything he can say in the language.
- e. Be able to understand the variations of the Cree language in different geographic areas.

III. THE LEARNING PROCESS

To assist teachers in developing the languages with ease and control, elements of curriculum and instruction should be emphasized and put into practise. These include:

Interaction
Semantics
Media
Speech

Each element related to internal and external behaviours which lead into creative situations in which the Cree language could be utilized.

Interaction

Inter-relationships involving a student body and the teacher can help the learners to accept the teacher with the trust and warm feeling so as to facilitate communication.

Semantics

One effective method of learning a language relied upon the semantics. This is a science dealing with the relationships between symbols. (signs)

- in this case Cree Syllabics and what they refer to - and human behaviour in reaction to symbols, including unconscious attitudes, influences of social institutions and linguistic assumptions. Semantics has as an objective a systematization of the language and the verification of sagacious knowledge.

Media

Media has become a very effective means of communication and of conveying valid information. It is hoped that teachers of the Cree language will use audio-visual equipment and materials to their advantage, utilizing them in effective teaching strategies. This can make the learning quite interesting. Media catches the eye of the learner. Any readily available materials in media pertaining to the Cree language should be used.

Speech

The Cree teacher will have to explain the sound system to the students. There will be a need for explanation of the speech sounds and of why Cree Indians experience difficulties with some English words. The study should develop understanding of how English has affected the Cree sound system.

IV. MINIMUM EXPECTATIONS FOR SKILL DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

THREE-YEAR PROGRAM - GRADES 10, 11 AND 12

LISTENING COMPREHENSION

By the end of Grade 12, the student, by listening, will have developed his ability to:

1. Distinguish phonetic differences within the Cree sound system;
2. Distinguish Cree intonation and stress patterns;
3. To comprehend the spoken language by making appropriate non-verbal physical responses eg. nodding, movement
4. Demonstrate understanding of familiar questions, statements, and instructions which incorporate the basic elements of the program;
5. Demonstrate understanding of new combinations of structures and vocabulary of the program;
6. Understand various speakers using the linguistic structures of the program including Plains Cree and major applicable dialects.
7. Recognize specific information and dates;
8. Demonstrate comprehension of information and ideas containing familiar and to a lesser degree unfamiliar terminology.

SPEAKING

By the end of Grade 12, the student will have developed his ability to:

1. Produce accurately Cree sounds, intonation, rhythm, stress, elision and liaison;
2. Respond orally to cues which require the use of basic linguistic elements of the program;
3. Produce a sentence by recombining known elements;
4. Describe a familiar situation from cultural or textual materials;
5. Relate a sequence of actions;
6. Ask for information using familiar vocabulary;
7. Interview someone using basic elements of the program;
8. Speak with prior preparation on a selected topic;
9. Participate in a simple conversation or discussion on a familiar topic;
10. Express some of his/her own ideas, feelings, and routine activities.

READING

By the end of Grade 12, a student will have furthered his ability to:

1. Read silently with comprehension familiar materials learned orally;
2. Read aloud familiar vocabulary and global expressions and correct rhythm and pronunciation;
3. Read silently with the comprehension, recombinations and rearrangements of familiar material;
4. Read for general meaning material containing unfamiliar terminology;
5. Read for specific information and ideas;
6. Read for major ideas contained in a short text;
7. Read newspaper and magazine articles and/or simple stories for pleasure.

WRITING

By the end of Grade 12, the student will have developed his ability to:

1. Produce new combinations or variations from given elements;
2. Write from dictation, sentences containing recombinations of learned written materials;
3. Express oneself in original sentences in a short paragraph;
4. Write a guided composition;
5. Write a letter to a friend.

CULTURAL UNDERSTANDING

By the end of Grade 12, the student will have developed his ability to:

1. Demonstrate awareness of Indian cultures in Canada;
2. Describe some differences and similarities between these Indian cultures and ones own;
3. Recognize the significance of simple gestures, facial expressions, intonation and stress used by the speaker to convey his intents, feelings or emotions;
4. Recognize cultural connotations of familiar vocabulary and expressions;
5. Use common conventions.

V. MAJOR CULTURAL THEMES

These cultural themes are to be developed as part of the Cree 15-25-35 program, but specific topics within each theme is left to the discretion of the teacher:

1. Role of the family
2. Conventions
3. Environment
4. Traditions and Customs
5. Pre and post contact influences on the Cree society and the country: role of the government and impact on the value system.
6. Communities

VI. EVALUATION

The evaluation of the curriculum and its implementation should be based mainly on the stated objectives. As reading and writing are a major part of the objectives, evaluation will become formalized. The students will have to demonstrate control of written vocabulary, phonological techniques and grammatical concepts. Teachers should attempt to balance testing techniques to include recognition, comprehension, recall and creative responses.

VII. PRIMARY LEARNING RESOURCES

Cree 15

1. A Cree Syllabic Exercise Book: By Douglas Ellis

Revised by: Emily Hunter and Mathilda Brerton, guided by Stan Cuthand, 1976.

2. Oral Cree Course: 1976, Emily Hunter and Mathilda Brerton
3. Cree Language, Book 1: 1975, Emily Hunter and Mathilda Brerton
4. Cree 15 - Cree Alphabet Endings, Book 1-2: 1975 Emily Hunter and Mathilda Brerton
5. Spoken Cree: 1975, Part 1, Emily Hunter and Mathilda Brerton
6. Spoken Cree: 1975, Exercise Book, Cree 15, Emily Hunter and Mathilda Brerton

Cree 25

1. Spoken Cree, Part II: 1975, Emily Hunter and Mathilda Brerton
2. Cree 25 - Exercise Book: 1975, Emily Hunter and Mathilda Brerton
3. Cree Stories: 1976, Emily Hunter and Mathilda Brerton

Cree 35

1. Spoken Cree - Part III: 1975, Emily Hunter and Mathilda Brerton
2. Cree Stories: 1975, Emily Hunter and Mathilda Brerton.

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